

Target Guides Reported Aiding Current Laos Drive

By D. E. Ronk

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VIENTIANE, Aug. 13—Forward air guides are "doing a fine job" of assisting the current Royal Laotian government drive to recapture large areas of Laos lost to Communist forces during the dry seasons of 1970 and 1971, U.S. government spokesmen say.

Forward air guides are specially selected soldiers who control U.S. and Laotian bombers from the ground, guiding them in on targets. The existence of the guides was divulged last week by the Senate subcommittee on United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, headed by Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.).

According to the committee's report, there are 182 such guides, 53 from the Royal Lao army and 129 from CIA-supported irregular forces in Laos, most of whom are Thai nationals and veterans of the Vietnam war, according to sources in Laos.

Sources say the guides are carefully selected on the basis of intelligence, experience and either ability to speak English or ability to learn it easily and well, then thoroughly trained. All are officers or senior non-commissioned officers.

Functioning like guerrillas, they infiltrate within sight of enemy troops or installations and direct either bombing or artillery fire onto the target, moving on after bombardment is completed.

According to the guides, their orders to propeller-driven T-28 bombers are relayed through forward air controllers flying overhead. Orders to U.S. Air Force jet pilots are usually given directly because of the speed of the bombing runs, hence the English language requirement.

Use of the forward air guides in guerrilla operations raises the questions here of further departure from the rules of engagement procedures established by the U.S. government to protect nonmilitary targets, procedures including prior clearance of targets by the U.S. ambassador in Vientiane.

Royalist T-28 bombers are already exempted from the rules as are U.S. bombing missions supporting infiltrating or exfiltrating troops, exemptions creating a "loophole" in the rules, according to the subcommittee report.

Doubt that the rules can retain even their limited success in protecting nonmilitary targets if guides are allowed to target bombers is expressed by many observers here, although the presence of a guide would appear to strengthen the system.

A measure of the successes being enjoyed by Royalist troops in their current offensive thrust in both northern and southern Laos is attributable to use of the guides working with air and artillery support, according to spokesmen. In northern Laos, irregular troops under command of Gen. Vang Pao at Long Cheng control most of the Plain of Jars, according to official spokesmen, while other sources say the irregulars have captured the entire plain, including Khang Khai and Phonsovanh in the northeast corner.

Intelligence reports through U.S. government spokesmen say that the high ground at the northeast corner of the plain is still held by a convention of Communist troops, however, blocking movement along routes leading toward Dienbienphu in North Vietnam.

Forward air guides are said

to have played an important role in Vang Pao's movement back onto the plain.

In southern Laos, Royal Laotian government troops continue a slow, careful thrust toward Paksong on the Bolovens plateau east of Pakse under cover of bombing and artillery, much of it controlled by the guides.

Paksong, informed sources say, is expected to be captured by Royalist troops within the next few days.

Thirty-five miles east of Savannakhet and 120 miles north of Pakse, a third thrust has stalled about the town of Moung Phalane after encountering stiff enemy resistance, according to the government sources. Air guides are believed to be operating with guerrilla troops beyond Moung Phalane, although the town itself has not been occupied.

Considerable complaint has been expressed in months both by Laotians and by U.S. mission sources working in northern Laos over indiscriminate bombing in particular by Lao planes—which, according to U.S. mission sources, get their bombing sorties over with quickly to earn extra pay. As the report says, pilots in at least two of Laos' five military regions receive a "bonus" based on the number of sorties flown. U.S. sources say Laotian pilots get \$1 per sortie and that the payment produces frequent "dumping" only minutes from their bases at Luang Prabang and Long Cheng during routine missions.

Part of the rising American investment in bombing ordnance is attributed by a knowledgeable source to the dumping, though the bulk of the rise is in cost alone. Dated bomb stocks now have been expended, thus requiring purchase of new ordnance at prevailing prices.

Although there may be more frequent success in actually bombing the enemy by using guides, observers here fear that their existence will merely add to the illusion that bombing is more controlled in use of non-Laotians is also seen as dangerous.

SENATE, ADMINISTRATION DISPUTE ON THAIS IN LAOS

Two months after the Senate met behind closed doors to discuss United States involvement in Laos, a sanitized version of what was said June 7 during the secret session was printed in the *Congressional Record* Aug. 3. (*Secret session, Weekly Report p. 1268*)

Although the censored version of the discussion was punctuated by deleted facts, the arguments which evolved from the missing material provided a picture of the difficulties encountered when members of Congress, who feel they have a right to know, attempt to obtain information classified secret by the executive branch and learn the position of the Administration on disclosing such information.

Also revealed in the debate was the executive branch's explanations for congressional charges that secret U.S.-supported military operations had been carried out in defiance of the laws set by Congress.

The first attempt to acquire information that was mentioned in the censored floor debate was a letter written by Sen. J.W. Fulbright (D Ark.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. The Jan. 27, 1971, letter was to Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird and included a list of questions on Laos.

The April 14 Pentagon reply was signed by Assistant Defense Secretary G. Warren Nutter, who wrote: "I regret we are unable to comply with your request in this instance. It would not be at all appropriate to disclose outside the executive branch highly sensitive information on military combat operations of the kind your questions would elicit if answers were to be provided."

When the Senate met June 7 in secret session, members were briefed on the Laos situation by Sen. Stuart Symington (D Mo.) from a Foreign Relations Committee staff report. The staff report was sanitized and released Aug. 3 also. (*Weekly Report p. 1660*)

Thai Guerrillas. Included in the censored staff report was a section dealing with Thai irregular forces fighting in Laos. "The CIA supervises and pays for the training of these irregulars in Thailand," the report stated, "and provides their salary, allowances (including death benefits) and operational costs in Laos.... The Thai irregulars are transported from Thailand to Laos by Air America (private airline sponsored by the CIA) and are returned to Thailand when their tours are up again."

Sen. Clifford P. Case (R N.J.), a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, had sent a letter to the State Department April 23 requesting information on any agreements between the United States and Thailand by which Thai troops were being imported into Laos against the provisions of United States law.

Assistant Secretary of State David M. Abshire replied to Case's letter May 19: "We believe that it has been made clear that this is not a question of U.S. support for regular Thai forces in Laos. The irregular forces involved, while raised and trained in Thailand, are all one-year volunteers who go to Laos to serve under the command of the Royal Lao government. These guerrilla forces are therefore considered to be local forces in Laos."

Abshire further explained: "There are no written agreements between our government and the governments of Thailand or Laos concerning this program. All agreements are made orally."

Thai Mercenaries and the Law

The paragraphs below were excerpted from the 1971 Defense Department Appropriations bill (PL 91-668). The first section of this provision prohibits the United States from hiring mercenaries (from a third country) to fight in either Laos or Cambodia. The second provides the means by which such a practice could be justified.

"Nothing...hereunder shall be construed as authorizing the use of any such funds to support Vietnamese or other free world forces in actions designed to provide military support and assistance to the governments of Cambodia or Laos.

"Provided further, that nothing contained in this section shall be construed to prohibit support of action required to insure the safe and orderly withdrawal or disengagement of U.S. forces from Southeast Asia or to aid in the release of Americans held as prisoners of war."

After reading Abshire's letter to the Senate, Symington said: "Common sense forces one to ask, how can these Thai irregulars in Laos be described as local forces? They are Thai, not Lao. They are recruited in Thailand, not Laos."

Sen. Robert P. Griffin (R Mich.), Assistant Minority Leader, argued in behalf of the Administration: "There is no question, I suppose, under the language here, that if the Thai government sent forces into Laos under a Thai military command and they fought, that there would be a violation (of the law)." (*Box this page*)

"But are we going to say that the Laos military command cannot recruit volunteers...should limit the recruiting of troops in its own country?" Griffin said.

The *Washington Post* subsequently reported Aug. 9 that at least some of the CIA-supported Thai irregulars fighting in Laos were recruited directly from the ranks of the Thai armed forces and were asked to accept special assignments in all-Thai battalions fighting in Laos. In response to the Post story, a State Department spokesman said that the Thai soldiers in Laos were fighting there in violation of the Geneva Accords of 1962, but only because some 80,000 North Vietnamese were moving against the neutralist country. The State Department spokesman did not confirm or deny the Post story, and no mention was made of violation of United States statutes.

Safe and Orderly Withdrawal. The justification advanced on the Senate floor for B-52 bombings in northern Laos and along the Ho Chi Minh trail in southern Laos was that it was part of over-all U.S. strategy to ensure the safe and orderly withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Vietnam. Symington said his staff investigators were told that the bombings were crucial to the withdrawal plans because they interrupted supplies coming down the Ho Chi Minh trail bound for South Vietnam and kept enemy forces pinned down in Laos when, if unharassed, they would be an added force against the South Vietnamese.

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"This," Symington said, "we are told, will buy more time for Vietnamization." Symington said that what his investigators were not told was how long the operations would continue in Laos. He conceded the bombings in southern Laos along the Ho Chi Minh trail might be of some help to the South Vietnamese and to the successful withdrawal of U.S. troops.

"But if anyone tries to justify the bombings and napalming of military and occasionally civilians up in northern Laos as a way to protect Americans we say are leaving Vietnam, in my judgment they are very wrong," Symington said.

"The stated aim of Vietnamization," he said, "is to spend these billions in order to put the Thieu-Ky government of South Vietnam in a position to defend itself after U.S. forces have been withdrawn. But what about Laos?"

"Surely the Lao are in no position to defend themselves, and the South Vietnamese have shown they are not capable of fighting in Laos even with extensive U.S. air support. Are we to believe our involvement in Laos will end when our troops are withdrawn from Vietnam? Or are we planning to stay and fight and pay for others to fight indefinitely?"

"It has now become clear that the United States is using the people of Laos for its own purposes, at a startlingly heavy increased cost to our taxpayers in money and to the Lao people in terms of destroyed hopes, destroyed territory and destroyed lives."

CIA Budget. Symington, who was a member of the Armed Services Committee's CIA Oversight Subcommittee, said that he did not know about the details of the CIA-supported irregular army in Laos until the Foreign Relations Committee issued the staff report. "In all my committees there is no real knowledge of what is going on in Laos," he said. "We do not know about the cost of the bombing. We do not know about the people we maintain there. It is a secret war."

Sen. Jack Miller (R Iowa) said: "We should not leave the impression that the Senate somehow or other has been helpless in this matter. We are all mature individuals, and we know what we are doing. We have appropriated a lot of money for the CIA. If we have done so, knowing the CIA is an executive privilege agency, I think we have done so with our eyes wide open. Maybe we should change that. That is something else. But let us not say the Senate has been hoodwinked or leave the impression we have been misled and have not known what is going on."

FOREIGN TRAVEL

Many members of Congress planned foreign travel during the summer recess, at both government and personal expense. Congressional trips in 1970 at public expense totaled at least \$825,118, according to a study by Congressional Quarterly. (*Weekly Report* p. 1383)

Asia. Speaker Carl Albert (D Okla.) led a bipartisan group of 24 Representatives on a two-week tour of Asia which included visits to Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Philippines. Seventeen members were accompanied by their wives.

Transportation was at government expense aboard an Air Force passenger jet. Members, wives and staff

were to pay their own hotel bills and other expenses, according to an aide in the Speaker's office.

Democrats on the trip were:

Representatives Joseph P. Addabbo (N.Y.), Edward P. Bolland (Mass.), John C. Culver (Iowa), Eligio de la Garza (Texas), Frank E. Denholm (S.D.), Thomas S. Foley (Wash.), Cornelius E. Gallagher (N.J.), Richard T. Hanna (Calif.), John M. Murphy (N.Y.), Edward J. Patten (N.J.), W. R. Poage (Texas), Melvin Price (Ill.), James H. Scheuer (N.Y.) and Lester L. Wolff (N.Y.).

Republicans were:

William G. Bray (Ind.), Tim Lee Carter (Ky.), Silvio O. Conte (Mass.), John J. Duncan (Tenn.), Delbert L. Latta (Ohio), Robert Price (Texas), James H. (Jimmy) Quillen (Tenn.), J. William Stanton (Ohio) and Larry Winn Jr. (Kan.).

Africa-Europe. Rep. Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D Mich.), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, and Guy Vander Jagt (R Mich.), a member of the subcommittee, left Aug. 6 for a month-long fact-finding trip to Africa and Europe. They were accompanied by two committee staff consultants and one aide to Vander Jagt, traveling at his own expense.

The group first went to Portugal, Portuguese Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands. On Aug. 11, they went to South Africa. Diggs, a Negro, was refused a visa for a planned South African visit in 1966. The itinerary included Nigeria, Gambia, Senegal, Mauritania and Algeria, Morocco, Paris and Stockholm.

Rep. Seymour Halpern (R N.Y.) planned to join the group in Mauritania for the last leg of the trip.

Military Bases. Seven members of the House Armed Services Committee were scheduled to leave Aug. 20 for a two-week tour of military installations in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. They were:

Representatives W. C. (Dan) Daniel (D Va.), William L. Dickinson (R Ala.), John E. Hunt (R N.J.), Robert H. Mollohan (D W.Va.), Bill Nichols (D Ala.) and Bob Wilson (R Calif.).

Paris. Thirteen Senators and 10 Representatives planned to attend the 60th conference of the Inter-parliamentary Union in Paris Sept. 2 to 11. The value of U.S. participation in the union has been questioned in the past in Congress. Rep. H. R. Gross (R Iowa) called it "the granddaddy of all junketing organizations" in a speech May 6 on the House floor.

Senate delegates to the meeting were:

Gordon Allott (R Colo.), Birch Bayh (D Ind.), Vance Hartke (D Ind.), Ernest F. Hollings (D S.C.), Jacob K. Javits (R N.Y.), B. Everett Jordan (D N.C.), Len B. Jordan (R Idaho), Mike Mansfield (D Mont.), Frank E. Moss (D Utah), William B. Saxbe (R Ohio), Hugh Scott (R Pa.), John Sparkman (D Ala.) and Harrison A. Williams Jr. (D N.J.).

House delegates were:

Jackson E. Betts (R Ohio), Bob Casey (D Texas), Edward J. Derwinski (R Ill.), Lee H. Hamilton (D Ind.), John Jarman (D Okla.), Robert McClory (R Ill.), John S. Monagan (D Conn.), F. Bradford Morse (R Mass.), Alexander Pirnie (R N.Y.) and Bob Wilson (R Calif.).

Bengal. Chairman Edward M. Kennedy (D Mass.) of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Refugees and Escapees arrived Aug. 10 in India for a week-long survey of the East Pakistani refugee problem. Kennedy had planned to go to East and West Pakistan and to meet with President Yahya Khan, but the Pakistani government canceled the visit.

An aide to Kennedy said the Senator would remain in India until Aug. 17 as originally planned, touring refugee camps near Calcutta and meeting with Indian leaders in New Delhi.